Making Good Citizens of Farm Youngsters

Five Thousand Boys and Girls of West Virginia Demonstrate That They Can Be Useful and Happy in Country Environment

By ROSS B. JOHNSON

"ONE thing I do want to say is that I consider your 4-H club plan (which uses the Head, Hand, Heart and Health to represent the mental, social, religious and physical development) the finest thing that has ever been done for country boys and girls. You cannot tell how wonderful it seems to me to hear the boys and girls in the homes I visited tell of their experiences in the 4-H camps. You have reached the boys and girls at just the right time, and have succeeded in making them once and forever county, state and national citizens. Your club movement develops personality."

Thus Miss Emily Hoag, an associate of Dr. C. J. Galpin of the office of Farm Management and Farm Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, writes of farm boys' and girls' club work in West Virginia. She has just made a trip covering many counties of that state to get a "close-up" of the club work, and her years of experience in the analytical study of welfare problems make her opinion of more than ordinary interest.

There are about 1,000,000 members of farm boys' and girls' clubs in the various states, but until recently only the economic side of the club work has been emphasized. But West Virginia took the viewpoint that the boy and girl must be developed right at home, mentally, religiously, socially and physically, to be a well-balanced citizen. On that broad basis, 5,000 West Virginia farm boys and girls are now giving daily demonstrations to the other youngsters of America—how they can grow and be useful and happy on their home farms. The West Virginia idea has attracted wide attention, Miss Hoag being only one of several experts who went into West Virginia to see the club plan actually at work.

For example, W. W. Armentrout, who has studied child welfare in Tennessee and other states for the National Child Labor Commission, is now helping prepare a report for this commission on conditions in West Virginia. In a recent letter he says:

"Several things have impressed me as I have talked with parents and children. I find that those who are not in the clubs seldom own anything, or have any savings or money of their own. Only in a few cases did they have any share in the farm income, except as spending money is given to them. I also find that the club is furnishing practically all the social life for the children, and that they have much more of it than where there is no club. The club work is creating among the parents an interest in the welfare of the children, which I have not found outside of it, and this is one of the most important things for child welfare."

The Child Welfare Commission in studying these clubs had in mind the possibility that such organizations might do more for the betterment of the country children than the mere passage of child welfare laws. The experience in the country in regard to truancy laws and similar measures concerning children has not been entirely satisfactory, and another means of attaining the desired end would be welcomed.

The old idea of farm clubs was that each boy or girl must compete for honors in the various projects, to raise the best corn or potatoes, the best sheep or chickens, the best wheat or cotton, or in some other way to prove his or her ability to do the things of everyday life and do them well. The club projects are elastic enough to fit the agricultural life of every section of the country.

But West Virginia regards the project merely as the first step, or just one part of the child's development. The work in that state is divided into four parts: the crop must be raised; an exhibit of the products made; an accurate cost record kept of the work; and an illustrated club booklet made and exhibited along with the cost record and the crop exhibit. Thus, the original idea has been greatly expanded and developed.

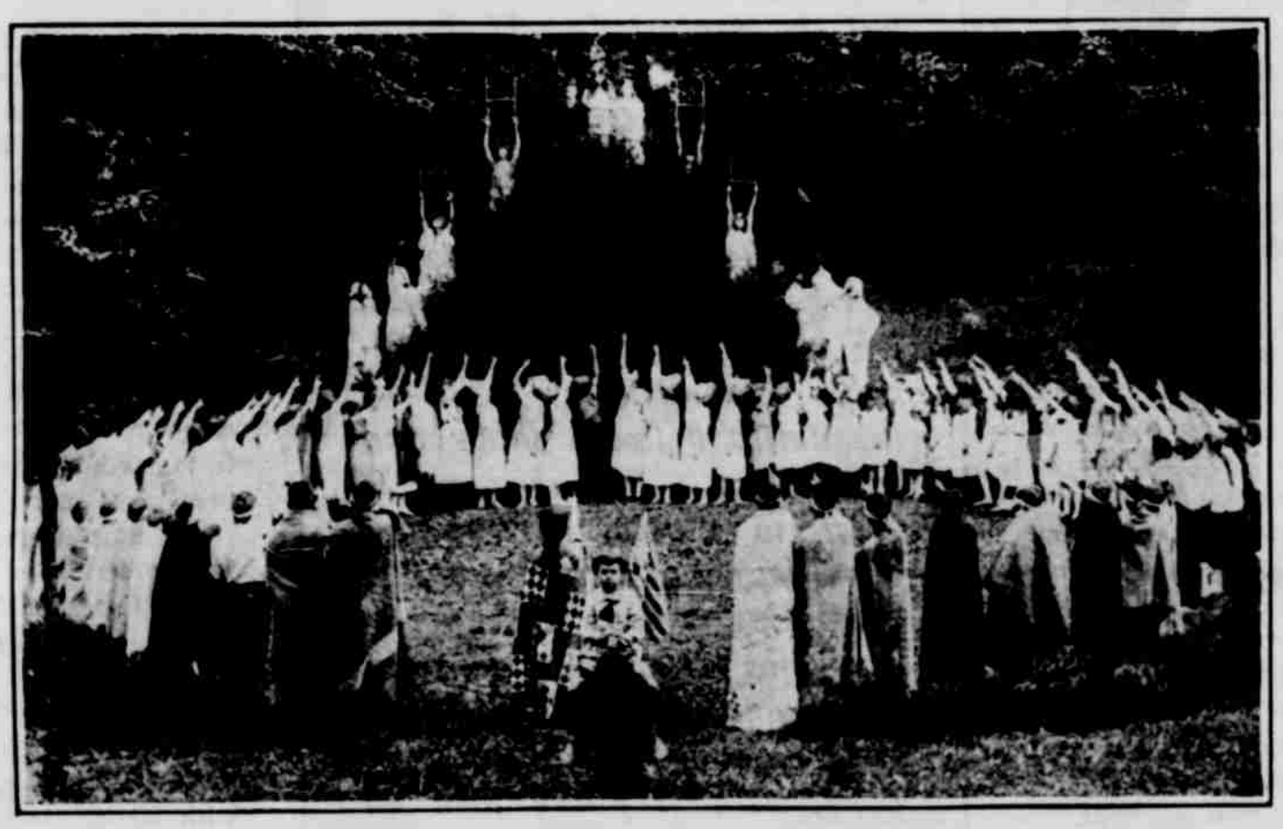
The clubs promote picnics, parties and other forms of social life. There are county camps, where the boys and girls get together for a week of instruction and good times. The prize winners of the counties meet at a state camp for further instruction. The camp programs are about equally divided between social and educational work. Properly supervised play and athletics are always favorite parts of the camp programs, of course. An H, representing the four-leaf clover is the club emblem.

The development of the boy or girl is measured by a charting system that considers the youngster from four general viewpoints. For instance, Theresa Dower, of Mason County, has become widely known in that state as a club member who became very skillful of Hand with her garden and canning tools, used her Head so effectively that she earned a net profit of $189, showed the trueness of her Heart by her honest pack, and fortified her Health by her outdoor work.

This charting system lets the youngster compare himself to the outstanding youngsters he knows. He may be up to the standard in one thing, but below in another. The chart doesn't stop at getting the record, but comes right back with recommendations that help the youngster raise his low points and stimulates him to do his best. Through the practical side of the project, such as gardening or raising a sheep or a calf, the boys and girls learn to appreciate the privileges and responsibilities of ownership. To own and manage a home project gives them the real sense of ownership that is fundamental in all training for good citizenship. The partnership which may be developed between boys and girls and their parents through club work is another factor of great importance in citizenship. The complete co-operation of the parents is, however, necessary to make real such partnership. The "boy's-calf-and-father's-cow" type of partnership will not accomplish the desired results.

A half dozen girls in a Monroe County club banded themselves together as the "Big Six," with the motto: "We can do anything any other six girls can do." They have asked for any kind of work that will help others. One of them, Eleanor McClung, says:

"What the 'Big Six' organization has meant to me, I can never express. I think the others feel the same way, for through these close ties of friendship we have been led and inspired by each other to do bigger and better things. It has taught us to try to do for others what it has done for us.



A pageant put on by club youngsters after three days' training.

"We do not expect to keep this organization in our county alone, but each one of us is going to tell some other girl in some other county about the 'Big Six' and why we want other counties to have a 'Big Six.' When they catch the spirit, I know they will see the worth-whileness of it. For when six girls are banded together, as we are, they are stronger and can be a bigger factor in helping their homes, church and community. When they do this thing they will never have cause to regret it. We never have."

The clubs are giving numerous examples of remarkable team work. They realize the importance of co-operation. One splendid club was the Fairview Club, 14 out of which had 15 members finishing their work, keeping cost records, making an exhibit and writing their illustrated booklet last year. There were two county prize winners in this club. The president says:

"When our club was organized, we could not play a single co-operative game. Now we can pass the time easily and profitably and the odd moments do not drag heavily for us. It is through team games that boys and girls learn to get along well together. There is nothing that brings out the yellow streak in a boy or girl more than playing a team game. One must be a true fourfold-life boy or girl to play a fair team game."

There is the Kerr Club, of Barbour County, of which Leland Booth and Lee O'Brien were the two oldest boys. Lee, the oldest boy of his family, had just entered high school when his father died, leaving a rough hill farm for the family to operate. The club spirit and the club training stood him well in hand. By hard work at home and in school, Lee graduated from high school and is now teaching school. Leland went to the state university and is now working his way through the college of agriculture.

Two other club members are in Broaddus College, two are teaching school and six are in Belington high school. In the same spirit of never-say-die, the whole club supported their teachers, on one occasion even going before the school board in a body to ask for things for their school. They got what they went after, too.

Carl Canfield is a club boy with vision.

"In 10 years," says Carl, "the boys and girls who are now club members will be grown men and women. Many of them will have graduated from high school and later some agricultural college. They will return to the farms with new ideas of farming and will make country life more attractive by equipping the farm and farm home with modern machinery and worth-while labor-saving devices. Last, but not least, the boys and girls, then grown men and women, will co-operate in efforts for the common good."

As a whole, club work is playing the part of first aid to our fundamental institutions, the home, church and school, and is in no way competing with them. It endeavors to act as the splints along a broken member, enabling the crippled one to walk straighter.

In West Virginia alone there are 150,000 boys and girls of club age (between 10 and 18) who should be reached by the clubs. Of this number, 20,000 have no opportunity to go to school because of lack of teachers, and 35,000 are being taught by teachers with no more than an eighth grade education. Of the remaining 95,000, only 4,750 are receiving education beyond the eighth grade. To reach these youngsters with club work would mean not only to continue their education, but also to follow the same kinds of activity that they would very soon enter as their life work.

In considering results, some very outstanding things are seen. One of the most satisfying is that in the more advanced counties the boys and girls are still sticking to the work, some of them are even now teaching school and leading the work, but they come back to the camps and still do some of the project work.

The first thing that has made the program so attractive to the leaders of the club work is the fact that there are 72 club members now in the state university and the colleges of West Virginia. Some of them are preparing themselves for leadership in this work.

Next in importance to this is the fact that 70 per cent of the club members who have turned in their reports have produced more than $250,000 worth of food and clothing, which means that practically every boy and girl produced an average of $50 worth of wealth. From this $50, the average indicates that they have made $25 profit. Of course, many individual profits were much larger than this figure and others correspondingly smaller.

The program being carried out in West Virginia is the outgrowth of several years' experience in which the lead has been taken by two West Virginia University men, Nat T. Frame, director of agricultural extension, and William H. Kendrick, assistant director of extension in charge of 4-H clubs.

Kendrick was a country minister's son in central Kentucky. After the usual college classical schooling, he landed in a position sorting letters in a post office. He had always been interested in boys' work, so while sorting letters he continued to think in terms of Sunday school and Y. M. C. A. work. He made a study of boys' work for several years and at length took up the boys' club work in West Virginia, where he came in contact with Frame, and the two united their efforts in this work. Frame declares that many of the things that are now being done in West Virginia extension work for the first time came into his mind when he was holding the horse in front of a country doctor's house as a boy up in New York state. At the George Junior Republic, Frame undertook a very radical step in his attempt to give the citizens of the Republic the opportunities for education without having any formal school and very little use of formal textbooks. Briefly, this idea was that a boy who could actually do practical problems in the carpenter shop that involved an understanding of common fractions was worth to the carpenter one-half cent an hour more than the boy who could use only round numbers.

This philosophy of education was made to form part of the foundation for the West Virginia club program.

Both Frame and Kendrick look on the clubs as the machinery through which country boys and girls can grow to the fullest possible degree and develop themselves in every way. Growth is the one thing that concerns every boy and girl. Nothing could be a greater blow to a youngster than to be told that he is not growing.